
MEMORANDUM

TO: Multi-Modal Transportation Task Force

FROM: Kent Morgan, City-County Planning

SUBJECT: Alan Wickman's Email (11/5/03)

DATE: November 5, 2003

COPIES: Staff Resource Team

Following the November 4, 2003, Multi-Modal Task Force meeting, I received the following email from Alan Wickman. He requested I forward the text of his email message along to you:

Comments made by Rick Krueger at the meeting this afternoon (11/04/2003) and the exchange and discussions that ensued move me to comment on the Task Force's deliberations.

The Task Force's bottom line should not be the promotion of multi-modal transportation as an end goal; rather, the promotion of multi-modal transportation should be seen as the means to an end. The "end" is quality of life. That is the goal.

The consultants' slide show implied that Lincoln is on course to grow from approximately 225,000 people living on 78 square miles to about 500,000 people living on about 150 square miles. They then stated that the ability to provide good bus and other transportation to this population will be a real challenge if the population density declines and additional "nodes" or concentrations of population don't occur. The consultants' closing remarks were that, while the Comprehensive Plan said a lot of nice things about promoting multi-modal transportation, current and projected land use patterns will make that very difficult.

With that background, Rick Krueger made the observation that he simply didn't see "the market" going in any kind of a direction other than towards less dense housing patterns and cars driving around with one person in them. This provoked comments that we need to look to changing all of this. It struck me that, during the

discussion, there was a lack of a common ground from which the politely warring parties could arrive at agreement.

I submit that the common ground is quality of life (QOL). Each individual adult or couple in this community chooses their place of residence and means of transportation to optimize their QOL. They always have and they always will. Don't think for an instant that people won't try to outwit whatever we develop if they think that they can improve their QOL by doing so.

The planners' challenge will to develop urban planning that will give the best set of QOL choices to Lincoln residents of various age levels, family situations and income groups. One person may be willing to live in a densely populated area in order to be within walking distance of work and/or shopping areas. Another person may want so badly to live on an acreage that he/she would view that as optimum even if it entails a commute of 45 minutes one-way. Not everyone has the same values and preferences, let alone income and ability. Most commonly, of course, we see people willing to live 8 or 10 miles from work in order to be in a new suburban development with large lots, wandering residential streets and no nearby commercial zoning. Could it be because those are the most attractive alternatives that we have now? Could it be that nothing else really even comes close for most people?

Well, let's suppose that we decide to go with growth patterns where almost all of the growth on the periphery of Lincoln is in single-family housing with large lot sizes. The planners can probably express this much better than I, but the result would be that downtown Lincoln probably wouldn't grow proportionately, because it would be more attractive to build office buildings and other commercial buildings along the intersection of mile roads and other areas that may be so zoned. It would make it very difficult for buses or anything other than single occupant vehicle traffic to serve the sprawl. I believe that this is what the consultants meant when they said that our current growth patterns are pointing towards stronger auto dependence.

Right away, it's obvious that this means that wide "classified" roads will be the order of the future, as people individually and the community as a whole attempt to optimize their QOL within the context of a city with a lot of sprawl. I'm not saying that this optimization cannot be done, but I must admit that I'm skeptical that it can. It forces us to ask whether the result is going to collectively -- for the citizenry as a whole -- result in a better or poorer QOL than today. If the answer is

that it would be poorer than today, then I submit that we've either got to stop the growth or come up with a better game plan. Actually, I submit that we've got to look at several alternative game plans regardless, just to see if some other approach will give Lincolnites a better collective QOL.

The "game plan" should be the community's choice from among a variety of well-considered "game plans," where the costs, benefits and trade-offs are understood well. It is my expectation that the "game plan" that best serves the UNL student, the elderly, the yuppie, the new family, the rich and the poor will involve additional areas with planned concentrations of population so that persons requiring public transportation or who simply like to be within walking distance of work or shopping will have that as a choice. I'm not saying that single-family residences on large lots are bad, but we're going to need to determine whether such housing patterns are more expensive for the community to support than denser housing patterns designed so that bus service (or other public transportation) works for the residents of those areas. If sprawling developments cost the city more to maintain QOL, or if they detract from the QOL for the population as a whole, then we've got to factor that into our planning. We've got to look at the QOL for the community as a whole.

To conclude, the bottom line is quality of life -- with adequate consideration given to the quality of life for those that are unable to afford or operate automobiles.

Alan Wickman

P.S. The Task Force knows that my special interest is bicycling. In my view, greenway-type trails are a quality-of-life investment with a return like few others. Making and/or keeping streets bicycle-friendly also promotes quality of life. Both facilitate transportation. Having said that, I'm not sure that development of trails and street facilities friendly to bicyclists are much of a function of housing density. I suspect that trails and bicycle-friendly streets and trails can be designed regardless of the housing densities around the city. To me, they are a QOL choice that the community should make regardless of what it decides on future housing density patterns.

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